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RAILROADING in NEW JERSEY

(New Jersey probably had a more important role in the establishment and development of railroads than any other state in the country. This article, the sixteenth of a series, deals with the heritage of that hardy individual, the suburban commuter.)

LET New Jersey's first commuter remain anonymous. It's much easier to picture him than to identify him—mainly because he probably didn't even recognize himself as a true commuter until he had been at the habit for at least two decades.

He knew, however, that he wanted to sleep in the country and work in the city, come high water or its traditional counterpart.

Certainly, however, that first commuter must have grumbled because there was not daily fulfillment of his naive hope that his scheduled train would be on time. Just as certainly he settled down day after day in the same seat on the same train and opened the same newspaper to the same page.

Occasionally he muttered about poor service and high fares, dirty cars and grimy windows. Later he joined his fellows and protested to the management about such matters and about other things like increased fares or unsafe trestles.

NATURALLY the management replied loftily that it was in the last analysis the commuter's fault. If he paid more money for his fare the service would be better.

Thus great grandfather commuter tussled with great-grandfather railroad official. They were establishing a recurring pattern for the ages.

Few people who worked in New York had any notion of living in such "salubrious" spots as Paterson, Morristown or Plainfield when railroads started rolling in the 1830's. They were nice places to visit, but no place for a working New Yorker to attempt to live.

Still, in 1841, a Mr. Lathrop of Madison stepped up and planked down \$100 for the privilege of riding the Morris & Essex Railroad between Madison and Newark for six months. At about the same time a Mr. King from Morristown, undaunted by the three-hour trip to New York, became a commuter.

Mr. King, it was noted, always took the precaution of standing, lest a loose rail (or



Fare "war" of 1858 as caricatured by Charles F. Morse, son of the telegraph's inventor. It shows Old Mother Public Opinion spanking the two "naughty boys" Morris and Essex while near-empty train leaves what was then called "Pluck" Station, now East Orange. Competing stagecoach is the Newark-bound "People's Choice," filled with "Oranges." Turtle symbolized the railroad's slow schedule.

(Picture Credits: Thomas T. Taber, Edward H. Weber, Bruce Owen Nett.)

"snake head") suddenly writhe up through the floor of the coach and impale him as he sat on one of the rough seats over the rails. Happily that hazard ended in a very few years with the widespread use of the "T" rail.

MEANWHILE, many Newark merchants made numerous trips to Jersey City over the New Jersey Railroad (now part of the Pennsyl-

vania). Some Paterson men found occasion to travel steadily between their healthful city and the busy port of New York, so many, in fact, that on November 28, 1843, the Paterson & Hudson River Railroad advertised:

City Workers Braved Crude Railroading in Their Early Travels as Suburbanites

BY JOHN T. CUNNINGHAM

"Persons wishing to commute for transportation at the present reduced price can enter into such an agreement by calling on the agent of the company."

There is evidence that the agent didn't have a particularly cheap item to sell, because a Paterson editor in 1847 pointed out for all to see that the New Jersey Railroad toted a passenger 35 miles

from New York to New Brunswick for 50 cents "and gives a ferry ticket in!"

Did the Paterson & Hudson River do anything so generous?

No. Not only did it charge the same amount for half the mileage, it didn't "give a ferry ticket in."

The consequence?

Why, of course, the editor wrote, it could be seen that Newark, Elizabeth, Rahway

Central's annual report for 1854:

"The increase in the local passenger and freight business is very large... owing to the fact that the easterly end of the line is peopling with parties residing in the country with their families but doing business in New York."

HOWEVER, in 1856, the New Jersey Railroad had some unkind things to say on the subject.

In 1839, the N. J. R. R. declared in its 1856 report, commutation rates were inaugurated to accommodate "three heads of families" who wanted a yearly rate. The fare was set at \$120, payable in advance. Scores of additional commuters had been added, the fare had dropped to \$65 in 1856. Sad to relate, the dropping of the fare apparently induced some less moral characters to become commuters.

There were all too many cads and sharpshooters...

There were those who chiseled free rides on the ferries. Some wanted money refunded if they didn't ride for a full year. Others boasted they hadn't paid a fare for more than a full year. Several loaned their tickets freely to others, while a few rode back and forth several times daily. The worst blow of all—some even went so far as to alter dates or to forge tickets.

Often the violations "involved persons of high respectability," the report concluded with unconcealed distaste.

It was bad enough to lose money on commuters, but to be cheated out of it...

The commuters had a few gripes themselves, and, in 1858 the good citizens of Or-



Chatham commuters of 1870 waiting to board train.

and New Brunswick were "improving rapidly." Paterson—despite its "romantic and beautiful scenery, its abundant markets and its healthful locality"—couldn't say the same.

ELSEWHERE, commuters sometimes became such by chance. There was, for example, Matthias Ogden Halstead, New York merchant whose firm was saddled in the late 1830's with a 100-acre farm in Orange, presented as part payment of a debt. Halstead journeyed out to look at the land.

He liked what he saw and ordered a handsome white home built not far from the railroad. Friends from New York liked the area, too, and they persuaded Halstead to cut up the farm and sell them lots. The Morris & Essex, for its part, agreed to stop a train each morning and each evening in front of Halstead's house. In return, Halstead built the first depot near "Brick Church" at his own expense.

One of the first official recognitions of commuters was a paragraph in Jersey



Conductor Samuel Johnson Snyder receiving well-wishes of passengers on his last Erie run. RIGHT: Henry Bancroft Twombly of Summit at three-score mark.



A. Clinton Wilmerding of Plainfield, oldest commuter on the Jersey Central.

ange exploded when the M. & E. announced a fare increase. Everywhere newspapers commented tartly that the railroad might better have lowered its fares and improved its service.

Others talked. Orange acted.

Commuters there organized a horse stage to take them to Newark, and rushed to buy tickets on the new Omnibus Line. They grinned appreciatively at the picture of a four-horse stage outdistancing a railroad car drawn by a turtle.

Orange papers insisted that the line did a thriving business—"beyond what its most sanguine friends predicted."

The railroad coolly ignored the matter (officially). Gradually, however, service got better (although the railroad archly refused to declare that the commuters' revolt had anything to do with the betterment). Customers drifted back and the Civil War doomed the horse line.

You commuters are a headache, the railroads declared . . .

Perversely, some railroads set about backing enterprises certain to mean more commuters.

THE Erie, in Bergen County, advised persons desiring to live in that "mecca of suburban dwellers" to "lose no time in selecting your property." Such action was certain to make "your children and your children's children rise up and call you blessed."

Under Central Railroad President John Taylor Johnston, who himself lived in Plainfield, the New Jersey Central Land Improvement Co. was formed to build up areas along the line.

Naturally commuters came, and stayed.

There was no question by 1880 that the railroads had shaped New Jersey's suburbs. Out through the state thin strips of growing villages and towns clung to the edges of the rails—winding tortuously around curves with the Morris & Essex, having a reasonable degree of regularity along the Jersey Central and sticking closely to the tracks of the Erie and the Northern through parts of Bergen, Passaic and Essex counties.

ENOUGH commuters of influential means had found a haven in Madison and Morristown by 1883 to induce the beginning of one of the state's most famous commuting trains—the "Morristown Banker's Express."

The de luxe train raced from Morristown every morning at 8:23 o'clock with no stops from Madison to Hoboken. At night it left Hoboken at 4:15 o'clock and streaked westward, first stop Madison. Any one who could arrive at work after 9 A. M. and leave before 4 P. M. could make the trip in 50 minutes.

Truly that polished train was an aristocrat. It had the right of way over everything on the railroad and the sight of its famous locomotive, the "Centennial," with Engineer Ben Day at the throttle, excited enthusiasm everywhere.

(A prosaic anonymous descendant of this famous train still runs, incidentally, even if with no fanfare, and is probably one of the country's oldest identifiable continuously operated commuter trains).

ONCE again, in 1888, Orange commuters were aroused, this time through a committee appointed by the New England Society to recommend ways of getting improved rail service. The recommendation led to a wooing of the Erie (then the New York and Greenwood Lake Railway), which agreed to supply "trains de luxe."

On Easter Monday passengers began riding horse-

drawn stages to take the rival line. The revolt lasted about three months. Its end was hastened by improved M. & E. service and lessening of the novelty of riding early morning stages across town to get the train, rather than any feeling about the Erie—then referred to as the "commuter's paradise."

Daily riders to New York totaled 50,000 by 1900, with the number increasing rapidly as improved methods of starting and stopping trains came into being—making train trips both faster and more comfortable. Commutation got its greatest boost, however, when the Hudson & Manhattan tubes opened in 1908, giving the commuter that long desired weather-proof transit across the Hudson River.

Then all of the grievances between commuters and the railroads came sharply to a head, culminating in bitter clashes between 1910 and 1912. That wrangling led directly to the formation of the Public Utilities Commission.

ALMOST simultaneously, early in 1911, the major commuting railroads announced increased fares. A hastily formed Commuters League of New Jersey, which carried the fight to the Interstate Commerce Commission, won a signal victory. The railroads were compelled to file new rate schedules.

The commuter, after 70 years, had won the right to argue with the railroads before an official rate-applying commission.

Most of the time, unless there arose the question of a fare increase, the commuter has always been more average than individual in the rush of 250,000 people heading east in the morning and west in the afternoon. However, through the years, some personalities have emerged—generally because they have had the travel habit for more than a half century.

New Jersey, in fact, has

(Continued on Following Page)



Commuter train and crew at Montclair in 1896.

Where do you hurt today?

- Muscular aches?
- Chest cold?
- Stuffy head?
- Muscular back ache?
- Simple headache?
- Rheumatic muscular pain?
- Tired feet?

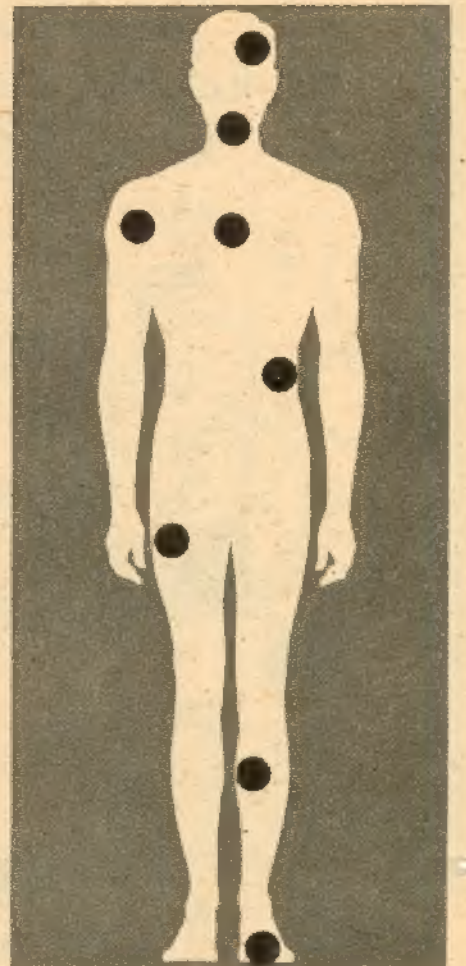
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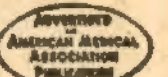
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JERSEY RAILROADS

(Cont'd from Preceding Page)
had a continuing succession of "champion" commuters. To mention any is to point up an absence of others, many of whom, unfortunately, continue to remain anonymous in the daily travels.

Take Frederick H. Smith of Newark, for example, acclaimed as "world's champion commuter" in 1913 in a New York newspaper contest. For 62 years he commuted between Newark and New York. That took him back to 1850—when commuting was really rough.

A flock of noted long-lived commuters who had started their daily treks in the late 1860's began to get newspaper attention in the '20's—including such famed ones as Captain John Hillyer Palmer of East Orange, Addison H. Day of Chatham, J. Z. Demarest of Closter, James H. Stout of Upper Montclair, Lucius F. Spencer of Passaic, Thomas N. Reeves of Newark and C. Symmes Kiggins of Elizabeth.

Kiggins, honored in 1926 when the Jersey Central opened its new bridge over Newark Bay, gave a beguiling word-picture of the early commuting days. He told reporters:

"Jerseymen were known by their dusters over in New York. We had to wear them or our clothes would have been wrecked by the smoke and dirt, not to mention the tallow drippings from the candles in the cars. There was tallow here, tallow there, tallow all over when I first started riding the Pennsylvania in 1859."

Kiggins switched to the Central in 1861, but there was tallow over there, too.

STOUT, Spencer and Demarest were located by the Erie when it sponsored an "oldest commuter" contest in 1924. Spencer would have won, but he died just before the judging ended. Stout and Demarest both began commuting in 1867, but Demarest won the contest because he had a month's lead on the Upper Montclair man.

No sooner had the judging

ended when Thomas N. Reeves of Newark told the papers: "That's nothing. I started in 1856 and commuted 68 years on the Pennsylvania."

Which points up the impossibility of singling out "oldest" or "champion" commuters at any time!

Chatham's Addison Day won considerable national fame between 1930 and 1934 as he continued his remarkable Lackawanna commuting record which started in 1868 and ended in June, 1934, just short of 1,000,000 miles of commuting. The Lackawanna threw him a party on his last trip home aboard the railroad president's private car.

THE tales of such men were vitally important, because they were a link—about the last personal link—with the days of woodburning engines, candlelit coaches, primitive seats and crude railroading. All of them told about the same story, usually glossing over the hardships faced by a 19th Century regular.

All of the long-time commuters also remembered with affection the train crews who tended their daily runs.

For example, in 1903, the riders of the "Morristown Banker's Express" honored Engineer Ben Day and Conductor Dave Sanderson at a dinner marking the 20th anniversary of the fast-flying commuter special. Gold watches were presented Day and Sanderson as visible proof of the commuter's best wishes. Meanwhile, wives of commuters feted Mrs. Day and Mrs. Sanderson at another dinner and gave them a cash purse of \$75.

One of New Jersey's most noted commuter conductors was Samuel Johnson Snyder of Upper Montclair, who wound up 69 years on the Erie Railroad in November, 1946.

Throughout the long years Snyder handled three generations of commuters, amounting to some 22,500,000 passengers. It took 2,500,000 miles of riding to pile up the total. Snyder's last trip was the occasion for great ceremony on the Erie—not the

least of which were the expressed sentiments of dozens of older commuters.

Last year, similar sincerity marked the "good-bys" of Lackawanna commuters to John H. Sutton of Morristown, who left his run after 51 years of railroading. Sutton's last day found him homeward-bound with an armful of gifts from those who had grown to like his cheerful morning and evening greetings.

NOT all of the long-time commuters faded with the '30's. There are still some men who every day climb aboard their regular train to add to already stupendous commuting feats. Three are named here—there probably are others—because they were feted by their railroads in recent years.

The Lackawanna on September 30, 1949, honored Henry Bancroft Twombly of Summit as he wound up 60 consecutive years of commuting. A. Clinton Wilmerding of Plainfield, the unquestioned dean of Jersey Central commuters, is still traveling after 70 years. Another 60-plus man is John S. Payne of Wortendyke, who commuted from April, 1885, until June, 1946, aboard New York, Susquehanna & Western trains.

As a matter of fact, three 60-plus men are creditable, since it is difficult for a man to hit 50 years of commuting with retirement ages pegged at 65 or 70 (not that commuters mind retiring at 65, any more than any one else). Yet, with doggedness, the commuter can still pile up some huge mileage figures. Such a one is Paul Everitt of Hackettstown, who a few months ago wound up 46 years of commuting.

By leaving Hackettstown at 6:20 A. M. and returning at 7:10 P. M. Everitt was able to cram the 120-mile round trip into his day. He made enough such trips to total nearly 1,500,000 before he retired!

Such is the commuter and his heritage, and such will he be unless the age of the atom interferes.

He minds his own business and he gets his paper read. He seldom bands together with his fellow riders for mutual protection. Sometimes a train wreck, a fare increase or a cut in service will stir him, but generally as long as he gets the 7:24 eastbound in the morning and the 5:15 back at night he's collectively silent—with the qualification that he can become vociferous at any time.

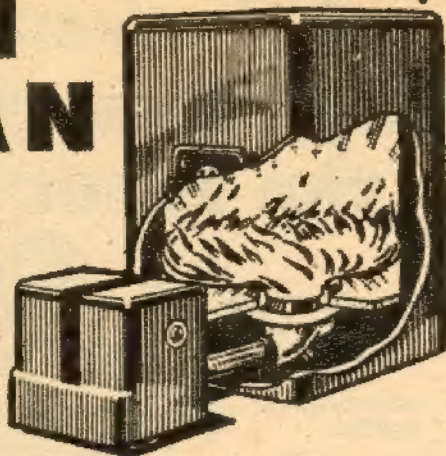
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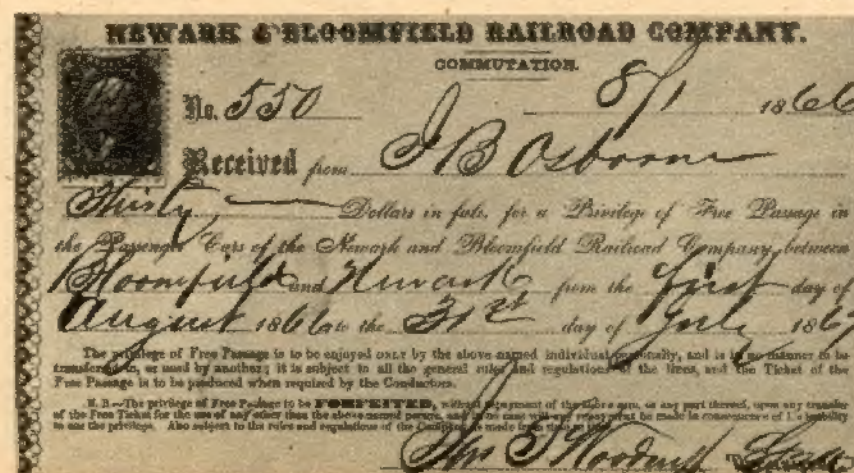
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